



## WHAT'S NEW IN HUMAN RESOURCES PROGRAMS?

### ***Diploma Mills/Bogus Degrees***

The Director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has launched a campaign to end the use of bogus degrees issued by diploma mills. Kay Cole James said in a May 13, 2004 memorandum to heads of departments and agencies that: "There is no place in the federal employment for degrees or credentials from diploma mills." She said that bogus degrees should not be used to qualify for federal jobs nor should employees be reimbursed for taking courses or getting degrees from the diploma mills.

OPM has conducted a review of its policies related to paying for academic degrees, tuition reimbursement, student loan repayment, employee training, and use of advanced education in the applicant ranking process. OPM has identified four distinct categories of higher education: Conventional/Accredited; Non-Accredited/Pending Accreditation; Non-Accredited/Other; and Non-Qualifying. Director James' memorandum gave specific guidance on how these apply to student loan repayment, academic degree training program, tuition reimbursement or employee training and position qualification requirements including the Student Educational Employment Programs.

OPM also conducted two, one-day seminars for federal Human Resources (HR) and Personnel Security officials who are responsible for reviewing applications for federal employment. ITA sent two HR Specialists to the seminars and they will brief the Employment Advisory Services Division staff on what they learned at the seminar. For more information on diploma mills and bogus degrees, go to OPM's website at [www.opm.gov/whatsnew.aspx](http://www.opm.gov/whatsnew.aspx) and see press releases issued on May 4, 5, 7, 13 and 14, 2004.

### ***Federal Agency Hiring Practices Survey***

On May 6, 2004, OPM Director Kay Cole James issued a survey to determine what are the actual hiring practices in federal agencies. The purpose of the survey is to help OPM and the agencies to determine how the hiring process can be accelerated. "Reducing the time to hire is a key component of making the federal government competitive for the best talent our

country has to offer," said James. "The Chief Human Capital Officers Act of 2002 includes a number of hiring flexibilities that agencies have long sought as valuable tools to improve the hiring process. These new authorities, coupled with the authorities already on the books, are intended to dramatically improve our ability to get the right people in the right jobs at the right time."

In February 2004, Director James issued a press release in which she identified the top ten things that agencies can do to enhance and expedite the federal hiring process. These include: eliminate self-wrapping red tape; use plain language in vacancy announcements; adopt an accelerated hiring model; recruit from college campuses; offer incentives for talent; utilize on-the-spot hiring authorities; leverage other new hiring flexibilities; recruit outstanding scholars and fully engage the HR staff. In an earlier memorandum for heads of agencies and departments in June 2003, Director James reminded them of certain programs that make it easier to hire students and recent college graduates. For hiring students, there are the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP) and the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP). For hiring recent college graduates, there are the Outstanding Scholar Program and the Federal Career Intern Program (FCIP). (The Department has not yet approved an FCIP program.) You can learn more about these programs by going to [www.opm.gov](http://www.opm.gov) and using the alphabetical site index.

### ***Improvements to USAJOBS Website***

OPM recently announced improvements in the USAJOBS website, which will enhance the job posting process for HR staff and standardize job announcements for applicants. The HR staff will have an easy-to-use job builder tool that contains a wealth of standard vacancy announcement text, which has been written in plain English. Announcements are automatically spell checked before they can be posted. Since the new USAJOBS website was launched in August 2003, there have been more than 60,500,000 visits to the site. Currently, USAJOBS averages 200,000 visits per day. The enhanced USAJOBS website, [www.usajobs.opm.gov](http://www.usajobs.opm.gov) is one of many initiatives developed by OPM to attract the best and brightest to the federal workforce. For applicants, the new online vacancy announcements are presented in a standard and logical format. Each announcement includes a statement by the hiring agency on the benefits of working with its organization.

One of the earliest initiatives that OPM initiated as part of the revamping of USAJOBS was a mandate that agencies work with OPM to integrate their automated recruitment and staffing systems with USAJOBS. This would create a "one-stop shopping" approach for all applicants for federal employment. The Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) in the Office



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of the Secretary (OS) has been working to integrate the COOL system into USAJOBS as part of that initiative. OS/OHRM is currently conducting an analysis to ensure that the Department comes up with the best and most cost-effective approach for an automated hiring system that meets the OPM requirements.

***Underrepresentation of Hispanics in the Federal Government***

In May 2004, the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda (NHLA), a non-partisan advocacy organization, called on the federal government to develop and implement initiatives to increase the representation of Hispanics in the federal government. The group cited the 2003 Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program (FEORP) Report, which was recently issued by OPM, and showed that Hispanics are the only minority group that is underrepresented in the federal workforce. Hispanics represent 13.1 percent of the civilian labor force but only 7 percent of federal employment.

The group asked that certain congressional committees conduct hearings on the problem and called on GAO to conduct a study of agency recruitment practices. Manuel Mirabel, chair of the NHLA, said in a May 10, 2004 letter to the head of GAO, "The lack of analytical data and programmatic information on federal agency recruitment and retention efforts limits the ability to develop comprehensive solutions to correct this critical problem."

At the end of fiscal year 2003, the representation of Hispanics in the Department of Commerce was 3.43 percent. Hispanic representation in some of the Commerce bureaus was: ITA - 3.79 percent; BEA - 3.26 percent; BIS - 4.97 percent; NTIA - 3.46 percent; EDA - 4.27 percent and MBDA - 17.20 percent. The Department is coordinating and leading an outreach effort to attract and hire qualified Hispanics throughout Commerce. ITA/OHRM is working both with the Department and also independently to expand its outreach to this underrepresented group.

***Outreach to Minority MBAs***

At a recent conference sponsored by the National Society of Hispanic MBAs and the National Black MBA Association in Washington, OPM's Deputy Associate Director for the Center for Human Resources, Jeff Risinger, discussed the many career opportunities for minority MBAs in the Federal government. "We have a tremendous need for new talent, new energy, and new creativity to do the work of the government in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," Risinger said. He noted that OPM's Director Kay Cole James is leading the effort to recruit a diverse federal workforce that has strong business credentials.

***Federal Hiring of College Students with Disabilities***

Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld issued a joint memorandum to Department and agency heads urging federal agencies to continue to support an Administration initiative that has successfully placed students with disabilities in summer and permanent employment. "The Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) gives students with disabilities the opportunities they need to start successful careers," said Secretary Chao. Last summer the WRP found more than 300 students with disabilities summer or permanent employment. Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), in cooperation with Defense, offers a database of approximately 1600 job seekers with disabilities on a complimentary CD-ROM. It is available with additional information from [www.wrpjobs.com](http://www.wrpjobs.com), or by contacting ODEP at 202-693-7880, or at [www.dol.gov/odep](http://www.dol.gov/odep).

***Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance (FEGLI) Program Open Season***

OPM announced the first FEGLI Open Season since 1999. The Open Season will be held from September 1 through September 30, 2004, to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the program. This benefit program consists of basic life insurance coverage and three options that include coverage for up to 5 times an employee's base salary plus coverage for family members. The FEGLI benefit provisions will not change. During the open season, federal and Postal Service employees in eligible positions will be able to enroll in the FEGLI program or increase or change coverage without having a physical or answering any questions about their health. The earliest that newly elected coverage will be effective is September 1, 2005. For additional information, go to OPM's website at [www.opm.gov/asd/htm/2004/04-203.asp](http://www.opm.gov/asd/htm/2004/04-203.asp) to read the Retirement and Insurance Service Benefits Administration Letter Number 04-203 on the upcoming FEGLI Open Season. ITA/OHRM will provide additional information to employees as it becomes available closer to the beginning of the FEGLI Open Season.

***Status of Telework in the Federal Government***

OPM, in partnership with GSA, issued the mandated annual report on telework in the federal government. In 2003, agencies reported that 43 percent of their employees were telework-eligible compared with 35 percent in 2002. The number of employees, who are teleworking grew from 90,010 in 2002 to 102,921 in 2003. Since the first survey in 2001, the number of employees who are teleworking has grown 93 percent according to the report. The conclusion of the report was "...that telework is growing steadily in the federal government, whether measured by the number of employees teleworking or by the growing maturity of



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agency telework programs.” To read the whole report, go to [www.telework.gov/documents/tw\\_rpt04/](http://www.telework.gov/documents/tw_rpt04/).

***Record CFC Donations in 2003***

The Director of OPM, Kay Cole James, announced that federal employees, Postal Service workers and the men and women of the military pledged a record \$248.5 million to the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC). That is a 5 percent increase over the pledges in 2002. The CFC is the only workplace charity authorized for the federal community. The National Capital Area CFC, which covers the Washington, DC area, received pledges totaling \$50.7 million, which is also an increase over 2002.